ELDERBERRY ARCHIVES

BY ZERBYTRON

A SERIES FOR ALL AGES ABOUT TWO GRANDPAS NAMED JOHN AND GEORGE, ALONG WITH THEIR PURPLE MONKEY FRIEND NAMED PEANUT AND THE GRUMPY HENRY.

ARCHIVE #6: SLEDS & SNOWBALLS

The wooden chest that previously caused spooky activity finally stopped, and for several quiet days and nights, nothing happened. It gradually faded over the months until it was gone. Grandpa John decided to enjoy the peace while it lasted.

That afternoon, he and Henry sat in the living room. A propane fire was lit in the fireplace. Two mugs of hot cocoa with marshmallows and whipped cream steamed on the table.

“It’s amazing,” John said, taking a careful sip, “how peaceful a house can be when George is not launching something, building something, or misunderstanding something.”

Henry nodded. “Don’t say that too loudly. He will hear it and take it as a challenge.”

Across the room, Peanut stood at the front window in his neon green aviator goggles. Outside, Grandpa George had parked John’s electric golf cart at the curb and was waving excitedly.

Peanut turned from the window and held up a sign:

“GEORGE WANTS TO GO TO SALONE MOUNTAIN.”

John set down his cocoa. “In this weather?”

Peanut added a second line:

“HE SAYS THERE’S SNOW.”

Henry groaned. “Of course he does.”

George burst through the front door, wearing his orange coat, gray gloves, and a brown knit cap.

“JOHN!” he shouted. “PEANUT AND I ARE GOING TO SALONE MOUNTAIN!”

John looked at the wet, snowy street outside. “George, Salone Mountain is covered in snow and ice.”

George cupped his ear. “WHAT?! You want soap and rice?”

“No. I said it’s covered in snow and ice.”

George nodded. “Exactly! Perfect for adventure!”

Henry lifted his mug. “I’m staying right here.”

John nodded. “Me too.”

George shrugged. “More cocoa for you, then.”

Peanut wrote:

“I WILL GO TO PREVENT A DISASTER.”

Henry read the sign. “Good luck with that.”

The electric golf cart hummed along the snowy roads outside Willowbrook. Gray clouds hung low overhead. The road narrowed as it approached Salone Mountain, where evergreens stood coated in thick white snow and the hills rose in bright, icy slopes.

George gripped the passenger handle as the golf cart climbed the final road.

“Wow! This cart is brave!”

Peanut held up a sign:

“THE CART IS SLIDING.”

George looked down at the wheels. “Yes! Fast snow driving!”

Peanut shook his head and pointed ahead.

At the base of the mountain stood three figures beside unusual machines.

The first was a twelve-year-old boy with dark brown hair hanging in straight bangs above gray irises. He wore a black winter coat, sturdy boots, and black gloves. Beside him rested a narrow mechanical sled made from polished aluminum runners, a compact steering bar, and two small battery packs secured under the seat.

The second was a seventeen-year-old girl with long pink hair and bangs, blue eyes, and a black winter outfit with a long coat, insulated gloves, and snow boots. Her mechanical sled had a wider frame, side stabilizers, a small control panel, and retractable metal grips for climbing icy slopes.

The third was Frostwell, a white-and-light-blue capybara wearing a blue knit hat with earflaps. Frostwell's sled had four short stabilizer legs, wide silver runners, and a low padded seat built to support his sturdy capybara shape.

George parked the golf cart in a snowbank.

Peanut immediately wrote:

"THAT IS NOT A PARKING SPACE."

George climbed out. "It is now!"

The boy looked at them with a puzzled expression. "Are you two here for the mountain course? My name is Yoshian."

George walked up and squinted at him. "WHAT?! What kind of name is Yoshian?"

Yoshian looked toward the snowy slope. "I guess it had something to do with a green dinosaur."

Peanut held up a sign:

"I KNOW WHO IT IS."

Yoshian nodded. "Yeah. Probably that."

George's eyes widened. "A dinosaur name! Excellent!"

Emily stepped forward. "I'm Emily Hizijo. We built the sleds to handle the ice trails."

Frostwell raised one paw. "Frostwell."

George shook Frostwell's paw enthusiastically. "You're frosty and swell?"

Frostwell stared at him.

Peanut wrote:

“HIS NAME IS FROSTWELL.”

George nodded. “That’s what I said.”

Yoshian showed George and Peanut the sleds.

“These use battery-powered traction wheels for level ground,” Yoshian explained. “The metal runners take over on packed snow. The front steering handles turn the runners. The rear brake claws dig into ice when you pull both levers.”

Emily pointed to the side of her sled. “These stabilizers stop the sled from tipping on sharp turns. We also installed heated coils under the runner mounts so ice does not lock the steering joints.”

Frostwell tapped his own control panel. “Mine has a lower center of gravity. It stays stable on slopes.”

George leaned close to the wiring. “WHAT?! It has celery joints?”

“No,” Emily said. “Steering joints.”

George nodded. “Very important celery.”

Peanut wrote:

“THEY ACTUALLY BUILT SOMETHING SAFE.”

George slowly nodded. “Yes. Safe. Very nice.”

Yoshian handed Peanut a small insulated sled seat. Peanut sat down, adjusted his neon green aviator goggles, and fastened the safety belt.

Emily gave George a helmet.

George held it up, intrigued. “A bowl? For ice cream?”

“A helmet,” Emily said.

George put it on backwards, but Frostwell turned it around for him.

Before anyone started down the trail, George watched a group of children roll a snowball across a small nearby slope. The ball grew larger as it gathered wet snow.

George's face brightened. "Oh! I learned something like that in a cartoon!"

Peanut wrote rapidly:

"DO NOT DO CARTOON PHYSICS."

George removed his helmet and began taking off his coat.

Yoshian stared. "What are you doing?"

George pulled off one glove, then the other. "I'm going to get my clothes wet, curl into a ball, and roll downhill into a giant snowball!"

"No," Emily said. "You are not rolling down the mountain."

Peanut held up a sign directly in front of George's face:

"YOU WILL HIT SOMETHING."

George smiled. "Only if I miss it."

Before anyone could stop him, George ran toward a patch of slushy snow near a shallow stream. He splashed both boots into the water, soaked the legs of his pants, rubbed wet snow across his coat, and flopped onto the slope.

"Observe!" he shouted.

Then he tucked his knees to his chest, wrapped his arms around them, and rolled. At first, he rolled slowly. Snow stuck to his wet coat. Then more snow stuck. The little ball became larger.

George rolled faster. "This is working!"

Peanut leapt onto his sled and pointed downhill, waving both arms. He wrote one word on his sign in giant letters:

“STOP!”

George rolled past him.

The snowball grew from the size of a barrel to the size of a small shed. It gathered snow from the slope, bounced over a ridge, and shot down a long icy trail that led toward Willowbrook.

Yoshian grabbed his steering handles. “We have to follow him!”

Emily activated her sled. The traction wheels whirred. “He’s headed toward town!”

Frostwell climbed into his sled and pressed the blue ignition button. “Hold on.”

Peanut strapped in again, still holding his sign.

The mechanical sleds launched after George’s giant snowball, which tore through the mountain trail, bouncing over packed drifts and spraying snow in every direction.

Peanut held up signs one after another, although George could not see them inside the snowball.

“THIS IS NOT SAFE!”

“TURN LEFT!”

“THERE’S A ROAD AHEAD!”

Yoshian’s sled sped alongside Peanut’s. “Can he hear us?”

Peanut shook his head.

Emily pushed her stabilizer controls and cut across a banked slope. “We need to get ahead of it.”

Frostwell’s sled accelerated smoothly. The wide runners carved two clean lines through the snow as he passed them.

The snowball reached the final slope above the road.

Below was Willowbrook.

Beyond the road stood Northcrest Heights.

And beyond that stood the shared house on Larrow Road where John, George, Peanut, and Henry lived.

George's snowball hit the crest.

For one breathtaking second, it flew through the air.

Peanut wrote a final sign and held it toward the flying snowball:

"BAD LANDING AHEAD."

At exactly that moment, Henry and John were still enjoying cocoa and chatting together.

"This has been a nice afternoon," John said.

Henry nodded. "George is nowhere near here."

A loud rushing roar grew overhead.

John looked out the window.

Henry froze.

A massive snowball flew above the neighboring houses.

Then, it landed directly inside Henry's dumpster. The metal walls boomed. The entire thing shook side to side. Snow blasted across the yard. Newspapers shot into the air like startled birds.

For three seconds, the backyard was silent.

Then John and Henry went outside to see what happened.

“WHY IS IT ALWAYS MY DUMPSTER?!” Henry shouted, throwing up his hands.

John shook his head. “Not again, George…”

Inside the dumpster, something moved. George’s head emerged from the snow. He was stuck upright, buried to his shoulders. His brown knit cap sat sideways. Snow covered his eyebrows, coat, and one ear.

John looked puzzled at the entire scene. “How did he — actually, I don’t want to know.”

George tasted a bit of snow on his glove. “Not bad. Could use some salt.”

Henry grabbed a packed snowball and hurled it directly in George’s face.

George blinked through the snow. “Ouch! That was cold!”

John stepped closer, looking at the snow piled throughout the dumpster. “George, salt melts snow.”

George stared at him, then smiled. “Excellent! More salt!”

John sighed.

Suddenly, the mechanical sleds finally arrived.

Yoshian climbed off first and looked at the damaged dumpster, the giant snowball, and George trapped inside it.

“I told him not to do that,” Emily said, pulling up beside him.

Frostwell adjusted his blue hat. “The sleds worked perfectly.”

Peanut climbed off his sled, his goggles frosted around the edges.

He held up one final sign:

“CARTOONS ARE NOT SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS.”

Henry read it, then pointed at George. “Make him read that every morning.”

John and Henry began shoveling snow away from George's shoulders, arms, and legs. Peanut helped by scooping smaller piles with a dustpan. Yoshian used a compact snow shovel from his sled kit. Emily carefully chipped at the now frozen ice around George. Frostwell pushed loose clumps away with his paws.

After several minutes, George's right arm came free, then his left arm, then one leg.

Finally, they pulled George out of the snow. He lay on the ground for a moment, then sat up.

"Successful mountain landing," he announced.

Henry gazed at his ruined home.

"No," Henry said. "This was a dumpster disaster."

John handed George a dry blanket. "Next time, use a sled."